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NSC BRIEFING

11 February 1954

## VIETNAMESE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

- I. Nationalism is powerful force in Vietnam
  - A. No lack of emotional and rational basis for strong anti-Communist political effort.
  - B. But Viets still not willing to go all-out against Viet Minh.
  - C. Little chance of changing their minds until they get what they want:
    1. Elimination of French power.
    2. Vietnam government at least ostensibly responsive to popular will and welfare.
- II. French power in Vietnam is reality, not Vietnamese delusion.
  - A. Viets are not impressed by high-sounding preambles of French-Viet treaties.
  - B. They appreciate need for French military support, but they also know that French controls, military and other, go far beyond what French require for efficient prosecution of war.
  - C. This causes Viet suspicion that they are being asked to fight for France, not Vietnam.
  - D. Effective will-to-fight can't be inspired without reversing this situation.

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III. Vietnam government is suspect, too, because too squarely under thumb of Bao Dai.

A. Strong nationalist objections to Bao Dai as man and institution.

1. As man, he lacks clear and unswerving dedication to nationalism.
2. As institution -- the Chief of State -- his powers are too absolute.

a. To serve in Vietnam government now is to be wholly at whim of Bao Dai.

IV. Strongest anti-Communist political elements are the Dai Viet party, the Roman Catholic community and the politico-religious Cao Dai sect.

- A. Dai Viet has able, intelligent leaders, with excellent nationalist records; it controls governorship of Tonkin and has defense and information posts in present cabinet.
- B. Roman Catholics number over 1 million; they are led by intensely nationalistic bishops who exert far-reaching moral and temporal authority through hundreds of parishes.
- C. Cao Dai is bizarre mixture of Buddhism and Christianity, whose saints include George Washington, Christ, and Victor Hugo. It has

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a pope with strong warlord tendencies backed up by 20,000 troops. But it would be strong asset if properly "nationalized."

V. Development of broadly popular leaders and parties is very slow.

- A. Main reason is fear that political activity under French aegis will boomerang in the future.
- B. Another is curbs on political activity by the Vietnamese government.
- C. Conservatism of government has discouraged development of large political potential of labor unions, peasant organizations, and other natural interest groups; Viet Minh did not make this mistake.

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NSC BRIEFING

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## VIETNAMESE POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

- I. Nationalism powerful force.
  - A. Emotional basis strong anti-Commie effort exists.
  - B. But Viets hang back, pending:
    - 1. Elimination French power.
    - 2. Responsible Vietnam government.
- II. French power reality, not Viet delusion.
  - A. High-sounding treaties mean little.
  - B. French military support needed, but power excessive.
  - C. Viets fear they fight for France.
  - D. No will-to-fight in these conditions.
- III. Viets suspect Bao Dai's absolutist leanings.
  - A. His nationalist record not clear.
  - B. He has too much power.

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IV. Strongest anti-Communist elements  
are Dai Viet party, Catholics, Cao  
Dai sect.

A. Dai Viets are bona fide nationalists  
hold key posts in present  
government.

B. One million Catholics under  
intensely nationalistic native  
bishops.

C. Cao Dai is mixture Buddhism and  
Christianity; warlord tendencies  
backed up by 20,000 troops.

V. Political activity retarded.

A. Viets fear to compromise them-  
selves in regime still under  
French influence.

B. Political activity is curbed by  
Vietnamese government.

C. No mass organizations (peasants,  
labor) due conservatism of

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